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ABSTRACT

Based on Homer's "Odyssey," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand literature originally presented in one genre can, with care, be adapted to another genre; and adapters of a literary work into drama must consider dialogue and stage directions. The main activity of the lesson involves students converting a scene from the "Odyssey" into a dramatic scene and act it out. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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1

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

The Odyssey

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Summer Productions, Inc.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. Literature originally presented in one genre can, with care, be adapted to another genre.

2. Adapters of a literary work into drama must consider dialogue and stage directions.

MATERIALS:
No special materials are needed for this lesson.

PROCEDURE:

1. Introduce the scope of this activity for the *Odyssey:* Students, working in small groups, will choose, from Books XVII through XX, a section involving two or more characters. They will convert that section into a dramatic scene and act it out.

2. Go over with the class the following important elements of a dramatic scene:

- The script of a scene must contain both dialogue (the conversations and asides of the characters) and stage directions (descriptions of setting, characters, and action). Not all descriptions show up in stage directions, however; sometimes playwrights drop descriptions of setting and of characters right into characters' dialogue.
- A scene usually deals with a single incident, which occurs in a single setting.
- The characters may not resolve a problem in a scene, but a scene must end in a satisfying way rather than simply trail off.

3. In a series of minilessons, as enumerated here, teach or review with students how to proceed from making prewriting notes for a scene, through writing, to revising and editing. Give the groups time to apply each minilesson.

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PREWRITING

- As previously mentioned, the scene must have at least two characters. The two characters may be friends or enemies. Each group must select a section of text with a clear beginning and end point—and at least two characters.

- The characters need to have at least one problem or issue to discuss and try to figure out or resolve. Students in each group should note the most important problem or issue in their section of the epic. They should make notes about how to introduce the problem or issue and then how to move it along.

- Each group should imagine how its characters look (including how they dress), sound, and act—and jot down notes for later use.

- Each group must also be clear on where and when the scene takes place, so the students should jot down their thoughts on background scenery, furniture, and props.

WRITING

- When students in each group are ready to move on to the actual drafting stage, let them figure out how multiple authors can work together.

- Introduce the matter of language: Do students want their characters to speak the language as presented in your edition of the *Odyssey*, or do students want to rewrite the dialogue as contemporary speech?

- Review with the groups, if necessary, the mechanics of listing characters and of writing stage directions and dialogue.

- Advise students to follow Homer's order of events and their own prewriting notes to unfold the scene, introducing characters and the problem or issue, building suspense if appropriate, and winding up at a satisfactory stopping point for the scene. Students should, however, be free to abandon any prewriting notes that may take them to dead ends—and rethink how to dramatize the scene.

- If not earlier, students should now title their scene.

REVISING AND EDITING

Share with students a checklist such as the following, giving them time to revise as necessary so that they can answer yes to all the questions.

- Content

Does the dialogue or stage directions clearly show the character(s) contemplating a problem or an issue?

Does the scene end naturally or artificially?

- Style
Is the dialogue realistic and easy for an actor to say?

- Grammar, Usage, Mechanics
Have you checked to make sure capitalization, spelling, and matters such as agreement, comparison, and pronoun reference are correct?

4. Each group should get a chance to read its adaptation in front of the class. Here are pointers for how to proceed:

- Each student in a group should get a copy of that group's final manuscript.
- Ask a spokesperson for the group to announce to the class the section from Books XVII to XX that the group has adapted.
- Then the members of the group should use their scripts to read the scene for the rest of the class. They may use props during their reading. As appropriate, actors should read or perform stage directions.

5. After each reading, the audience should comment on strengths of the adaptation and areas that were unclear or need improvement.

ADAPTATIONS:

Instead of having small groups working on their own to adapt different sections of the epic, select one section of text for the whole class to work on together—with you. Model for the class how to generate prewriting notes for an adaptation and then how to write the draft itself. Show clearly how you take certain lines of epic poetry and transform them into dialogue or stage directions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the similarities between the journey of Odysseus and events that have occurred in your own life. Think about the different choices Odysseus is required to make during his journey.

2. Discuss the women in Homer's work. What role do women play in the *Odyssey*, and how do you think they represent the women of ancient Greece?

3. Explain how the struggles of Odysseus to reach Ithaca are a contest between Poseidon and Athena as well.

4. Select an event from popular culture in which a hero or heroine is placed in a struggle. Examples from movies include *Shane*, *Schindler's List*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Patch Adams*, and *Alien*. Describe how the director or writer makes you feel toward the hero or heroine and his or her opponents. Compare and contrast this to the characters in the *Odyssey*.

5. The ancient Greeks truly believed in caring for strangers. Traditional voices in our culture have attempted to continue that tradition by advising all to care for strangers in need and teaching that such assistance is particularly pleasing to God. The media is quick to praise good Samaritans, and civic groups still award medals to humanitarians. But what forces in our time threaten to extinguish this tradition of kindness to and care for strangers? What can we do to care for strangers in need?

6. Revenge as a means of obtaining justice was more acceptable in Homer's society than in our modern society, which has a formidable criminal justice system. Even so, Homer's idea of revenge bears qualification. Define the nature of revenge in the *Odyssey* that suggests under what conditions it is an acceptable means of justice.

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate each group's scene using the following three-point rubric:

- **Three points:** contains all key ingredients from the selected section of the text; clearly introduces the problem or issue and develops or resolves it; reads very clearly and in a well-paced manner

- **Two points:** contains most key ingredients from the selected section of the text; introduces but does not develop the problem or issue; reads clearly in a well-paced presentation of the scene

- **One point:** omits key ingredients from the selected section of the text; does not focus on a problem or issue; reads poorly

You may ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining what constitutes a clear and well-paced performance.

EXTENSION:

Modern Monsters
For thousands of years, writers and artists have delighted in Homer's creative cast of monsters and adversaries. Ask your students to imagine a modern-day Odysseus facing a monster who vividly portrays something about the challenges of life in your school or community. Have students write a brief story in which the hero defeats the monster in some creative or witty way. Examples of everyday hazards include cars, buses, exams, sports, romance, drugs, peer pressure, curfew, and so on. When the stories are complete, have your students share them with one another. You may wish to have student artists represent the modern-day monsters for a bulletin board display.

Returning from War
Like Odysseus and his companions, all soldiers have difficulty and sometimes painful transitions when they return home from the battlefield. Have your class research some of the difficulties faced by U.S. troops returning from Vietnam in the early 1970s or from Desert Storm in the early 1990s. Students should compare and contrast these problems with those Odysseus and his men face on their journey home. Students should use their research to write an essay about what problems veterans of war may face and how they cope with such problems.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

The Gold of Troy: Searching for Homer's Fabled City
Vladimir Tolstikov and Mikhail Treister. The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, The A.S. Pushkin State Museum of Fin
More than 100 years ago, an amateur archaeologist guided by The Iliad searched for the lost world of Homer. This fabulous book of photographs and commentaries is the official catalogue of the Gold of Troy or Priam's Treasure exhibition of rings, bracelets, earrings, pendants, figures, axes, and beads dating from the earliest times. Even in modern times, these artifacts have an aura of intrigue and mystery.

Greek Fire
Oliver Taplin. Atheneum, 1990.
This book contains hundreds of beautiful pictures that help illustrate the ways the modern world has been inspired and transformed by Greek culture. It also has information on Greek tragedy, philosophy, science, mythology, politics, and warfare.

WEB LINKS:

Internet Classics
E-text of the *Odyssey* for downloading, plus links, discussions, and more.
http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.html

Mythology
A great place to start with Greek mythology. Includes an online fun quiz, an alphabetical list of the immortals, and more.
http://www.messagenet.com/myths

Climbing to the Top of Mount Olympus
A complete unit of study on mythology for middle school students.
http://www.coreknowledge.org/CKproto2/resrcs/lessons/698ClimbMtO.htm

Mythweb
At this site you will find a short version of the epic; teaching tips; and a character index.
http://www.mythweb.com/index.html

Greek Mythology Link
A complete guide to all the individuals in mythology, with stories and information for each.
http://www.hsa.brown.edu/~maicar/

Study Guide for Classical Love Poetry
Need some poetry to compliment your unit? Check out the study guide on this site!
http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/love-in-the-arts/classical.html

VOCABULARY:

archetypal
Typical of an original model or pattern from which succeeding representations are copied.
Context:
Every time you pick up the *Odyssey*, you are on the edge of talking about something archetypal, something that is always with us, something that is wonderfully generalized.

primordial
Primitive, primeval, or fundamental.
Context:
Homer created the first novel, and that is primordial in a sense.

template
A mold that establishes or serves as a pattern for future copies.
Context:
Homer's works were the templates for the western literary tradition.

wily
Crafty, tricky, or sly.
Context:
Indiana Jones is like wily Ulysses.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12
Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates a familiarity with selected literary works of enduring quality.

Benchmarks:

(6-8) Demonstrates a familiarity with selected poets and classic poetry.

(9-12) Demonstrates an understanding of why certain literary works are considered classics or works of enduring quality and substance.

(9-12) Identifies the plots, characters, and significance of selected works of ancient literature, including selected works of Greek philosophers, poets, and dramatists.

Grade Level: 9-12
Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks:

Benchmark 1: Makes connections among literary works based on theme (e.g., universal themes in literature of different cultures, major themes in American literature).

Benchmark 2: Understands the effects of complex literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of a work (e.g., tone, irony, mood, figurative language, allusion, diction, dialogue, symbolism, point of view, style).

Benchmark 3: Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

Grade Level: 6-8
Subject Area: world history

Standard: Understands how Aegean civilization emerged and how interrelations developed among peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 B.C.

Benchmark:
Understands the role of art, literature, and mythology in Greek society; how major works of Greek drama and mythology reveal ancient moral values and civic culture; how the arts and literature reflect cultural traditions in ancient Greece.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
Join scholars, artists, and other professionals as they explore the timeless appeal of "The Odyssey," woven from existing folk tales into a unified, riveting narrative that has come to symbolize the archetypal journey through life.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ▶

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
The Odyssey

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is an odyssey?

2. What are some important characteristics of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*?

3. What does Odysseus do at the beginning of his journey that causes his trip home to be so dangerous?

4. How is the theme of justice—that the gods punish wrongdoing—brought out in the *Odyssey*?

5. What is a myth, and what did the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology represent?

6. What does Penelope represent to Odysseus on his journey? How does she stall potential suitors?

7. Why is Odysseus treated as an outsider upon his arrival home?

8. How does the suitors' treatment of the beggar (Odysseus) seal their fate?

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The Odyssey

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What is an odyssey?
An odyssey is a long journey with many changes of fortune.

2. What are some important characteristics of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*?
Odysseus is a man who is brave, bold, a liar, and very human. These characteristics are important because they are both the cause of his difficulties and the reason he can overcome them.

3. What does Odysseus do at the beginning of his journey that causes his trip home to be so dangerous?
After blinding the Cyclops, Odysseus and his men flee the island. During his retreat, Odysseus tells the Cyclops his name. This turns out to be a mistake, because the Cyclops' father, Poseidon, is able to identify Odysseus and punish him for what he did by making him wander the seas.

4. How is the theme of justice—that the gods punish wrongdoing—brought out in the *Odyssey*?
Poseidon, god of the sea, punishes Odysseus because of his ill treatment of his son, Polyphemus. Odysseus had ignored the omens from the gods, and because he had shown arrogance and disrespect, the gods judged that he should be punished. However, Athena opposed Poseidon and supported Odysseus at every turn. She tried to make sure Odysseus became a better person than he was when he sacked the city of Troy.

5. What is a myth, and what did the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology represent?
A myth is an effort by the early peoples to explain the world around them. It is a form of history and sometimes even science. To the Greeks, the gods represented both the forces of nature and the nature of man himself.

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6. What does Penelope represent to Odysseus on his journey? How does she stall potential suitors?
Throughout his tests and turmoil, Odysseus' goal is to return home to his wife, Penelope. She represents a beacon of hope for him. In his absence, she stalls potential suitors by claiming she will marry one when she completes work on a shawl. She weaves the shawl during the day—but secretly unravels it at night.

7. Why is Odysseus treated as an outsider upon his arrival home?
Odysseus receives a tip from Athena that suitors have been hounding his wife to remarry during his absence, so he disguises himself as a beggar.

8. How does the suitors' treatment of the beggar (Odysseus) seal their fate?
Homer reveals the suitors' social and moral depravity by centering on Eurymachus, who throws a stool at the unfortunate beggar. It was the Greek custom to treat all those less fortunate with warmth when they entered a Greek home. The suitors did not reciprocate with the same devotion as Penelope did when they entered her household.

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